

June 19, 2007

Testimony of Rich Robinson, Michigan Campaign Finance Network, to the House Ethics
and Elections Committee on House Bills 4048 and 4553

Chairman Corriveau and Distinguished Committee Members:

Thank you for taking up the issue of no excuse absent voter ballots. I speak in support of HB 4048.

Although Michigan's 2006 election could be viewed as a year when voter turn-out was poor, rather than pathetic and embarrassing, as it had been in 2002, it is clear that we have a long way to go to reach a level of voter participation that reflects a healthy, active democracy. We should be concerned about making it easier for eligible citizens to vote. Allowing voters to cast an absentee ballot without requiring them to provide a state-sanctioned rationale is a step in that direction.

I speak in support of HB 4553 as well, although with less enthusiasm. Certainly, if any clerk can send an AVB application to any Michigan citizen over age 60 without being asked, all clerks should be allowed under the law to do the same. However, if we envision this as the time when all eligible voters can vote absentee if they choose, I hope that all clerks will adopt a more cost effective general information campaign to let all voters know that they are entitled to apply for an absentee ballot. After all, those over 60 are consistently among the most likely to vote. Let's extend the invitation to all who are eligible to vote, and let's promote more economical strategies to do so than mail.

Thank you for considering my perspectives.